Facework in Mediation: The Need for "Face" Time

"'Conflict' is for the most part a rubber concept, being stretched and molded for the purposes at hand."[1] Any attempt to intervene in a dispute is an intrusion into an already existing process of negotiation between the parties to the dispute.[2] Mediators are interveners who, in addition to assessing the climate of the parties' pre-mediation relationship, dealing with problems of perception, being on the lookout for imbalances of power, correcting false attributions, and shepherding the parties' negotiations from differentiation to integration, must be prepared to anticipate, identify and handle the below-surface image needs or perceptions of the parties. This aspect of mediation – the accommodation of the parties' "face" needs -- has been likened to "negotiating in a minefield."[3] In the discussion that follows, "facework" as a communication behavior is evaluated and it is posited that "face" and "facework" strategies should be considered in any mediation because "face" is a universal characteristic of being human.[4] As such, concerns about face must be managed as part of any negotiated resolution.

---

[1] Mack, R. and R. Snyder. 1957. The analysis of social conflict: toward an overview and synthesis. *Journal of Conflict Resolution 1*, p. 212. Conflict has also been defined as "the perceived and/or actual incompatibility of values, expectations, processes, or outcomes between two or more parties over substantive and/or relational issues." Ting-Toomey, S. 1994. Face and facework: an introduction. *The challenge of facework*, edited by Stella Ting-Toomey. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, p. 360.

[2] Keltner, J. W. 1987. Mediation / toward a civilized system of dispute resolution. Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, p. 7.

[3] Van Ginkel, E. 2004. The mediator as face-giver. *Negotiation Journal*, p. 475.

[4] Wilson, S.R. 1992. Face and facework in negotiation. *Communication and negotiation*, edited by L. L. Putnam and M. E. Roloff. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, p. 176.

The Concept of Face

The concept of "face" has been defined in many different ways. It has been defined as "an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes;"[5] as something situationally defined in reference to "the immediate respect a person expects others to show in each specific instance of social encounter."[6] The word "face" has been used "as a metaphor for our self-image vis-à-vis the public,"[7] and has been conceptualized as "something that is diffusedly located in the flow of events."[8] "Face" is a uniquely human phenomenon that has to do with the way we perceive how others perceive us.[9] It is a projected image of one's self in a relational situation and is an identity that is defined by the participants in the setting.[10] "Face" is a universal behavior, and yet it varies by individual and situation.

"Face" plays at least two distinct roles in mediation.[11] First, people bring their face needs and perceptions to the negotiating table, so those dynamics may play a role in the mediation process relative to how the parties interact at the mediation and may thus add a dimension to the conflict which the mediator must accommodate.[12] Second, saving or restoring face may be one

---

[5] Goffman, E. 1955. On face-work: an analysis of ritual elements in social interaction. *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of International Processes 18*, p. 213.

[6] Ho, D. Y. 1975. On the concept of face. *American Journal of Sociology 81*, p. 868.

[7] Van Ginkel, E. 2004. The mediator as face-giver, supra, p. 475.

[8] Goffman, E. 1955. On face-work: an analysis of ritual elements in social interaction, supra.

[9] Van Ginkel, D. 2004. The mediator as face-giver, supra, citing Cupach, W. R. and S. Metts. 1994. *Facework*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

[10] Ting-Toomey, S. and M. Cole. 1990. Intergroup diplomatic communication: a face-negotiation perspective. *Communicating for peace*, edited by Felipe Korzenny and Stella Ting-Toomey with Susan Douglas Ryan. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 78-79.

[11] Van Ginkel, E. 2004. The mediator as face-giver, supra, p. 475.

[12] "People have identities or public images they want others to share. Although the attributes may vary, people want to be seen by those they encounter as possessing certain traits, skills, and qualities. They constantly position themselves in interaction with others (Harre and Van Langenhove 1999). In short, *face is the communicator's claim*

of the underlying interests – or even the primary interest – of one or more parties and may thus add a dimension to the substantive negotiations which the mediator must be able to identify and then incorporate into his or her handling of the mediation session and shepherding of the parties' negotiations.[13]

Facework

"Facework" is a "subtle interpersonal encounter found in all societies, calculated to avoid personal embarrassment, or loss of poise, and to maintain for others an impression of self-respect."[14] People in all cultures want to maintain face and at the same time maintain communication and respect with others.[15] Facework refers to the behaviors parties resort to in an effort to deal with the conflict between preserving or serving their own face needs and accommodating the face needs or interests of another party.[16]

Facework management during mediation is necessary so as to validate and maintain the delicate balance between or among the disputing parties with respect to their self-esteem and self-worth needs.[17] In this regard, research has shown that beyond adding issues to the dispute,

---

to be seen as a certain kind of person….face is 'the positive social value a person effective claims for himself [sic] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact' (Goffman 1955)." Folger, J. P., M. S. Poole and R. K. Stutman. 2005. Face-saving. *Working through conflict, 5th edition*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, p. 145.

[13] Van Ginkel, E. 2004. The mediator as face-giver, supra, p. 475.

[14] Ho, D. Y. 1975. On the concept of face, supra. p. 868, citing Goffman, E. 1955. On face-work: an analysis of ritual elements in social interaction, supra; Goffman, E. 1956. Embarrassment and social organization. *American Journal of Sociology 62*; Goffman, E. 1959. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday.

[15] Ting-Toomey, S. 1999. Intercultural conflict competence: eastern and western lenses. www.cic.sfu.ca/forum/STingToomeyJuly131999.html.

[16] Id; see also Ho, D. Y. 1994. Face dynamics: from conceptualization to measurement. *The Challenge of Facework*, edited by Stella Ting-Toomey. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, p. 270.

[17] Van Ginkel, E. 2004. The mediator as face-giver, supra, p. 475.

the need to save face can lead to inflexibility and future impasse in the conflict;[18] that issues related to face are "among the most troublesome kinds of problems that arise in negotiation."[19] The mere presence of the mediator may allow the parties to move from one position to another without losing face because they can attribute any movement to the third party.[20] The challenge for the mediator is to promote a change of position between / among the parties without threatening their respective faces.

Face Negotiation Theory

In 1988, Professor Stella Ting-Toomey advanced "face negotiation theory" to provide an explanation as to the differences and similarities in face and facework that occur during conflict interactions. This theory argues that: (a) people try to maintain and negotiate face in all communication situations; (b) the concept of face is problematic in uncertainty situations when the parties' identities may be called into question; (c) conflict demands active facework management; (d) people in conflict will engage in two basic types of facework (positive-negative face and self-other face); and (e) parties' cultural background will influence their selection of conflict styles (avoidance and obliging styles versus confrontational and solution-oriented styles).[21] These propositions have been tested and largely supported by subsequent research.[22]

---

[18] Folger, J. P., M. S. Poole and R. K. Stutman. 2005. Face-saving, supra, p. 153.

[19] Id., citing Brown, B. R. 1977. Face-saving and face restoration in negotiation. *Negotiation*, edited by D. Druckman. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

[20] Id., citing Brown, B. R. 1977. Face-saving and face restoration in negotiation, supra; Pruitt, D. G. and D. F. Johnson. 1970. Mediation as an aid to face saving in negotiation. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology 14*.

[21] Ting-Toomey, S. 1988. Intercultural conflict styles: a face negotiation theory. *Theories in intercultural communication.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, pp. 213-235.

[22] Oetzel, J.D., S. Ting-Toomey, T. Masumoto, Y. Yokochi, X. Pan, J. Takai and R. Wilcox. 2001. Face and facework in conflict: a cross-cultural comparison of China, Germany, Japan and the United States. *Communication Monographs 68*, pp. 235-258.

In her face negotiation theory, Professor Ting-Toomey created a two-dimensional grid to describe four facework strategies that are used to negotiate public self image.[23] The first is face-restoration and refers to giving one's self freedom, space and dissociation (i.e., autonomy). The second is face-saving and is symbolized by respect for the other person's need for autonomy. The third is face-assertion and refers to defending or protecting one's need for inclusion. The fourth is face-giving and refers to defending or supporting the other person's need for inclusion.

Face negotiation emphasizes three face concerns: *self-face*, the concern for one's own image; *other-face*, the concern for another's image; and *mutual-face*, the concern for both parties' images and/or the image of the relationship.[24] According to Professor Ting-Toomey's research, Eastern countries tend to be more oriented towards other-face (i.e., they want to look bad while others look good),[25] while Western countries are more oriented towards self-face (i.e., they want to look good while others look bad).[26]

In the context of a mediated conflict, the mediation represents a communication context in which the disputants' face concerns will play an important role in the process and the mediator will be an active, contributing party to the interaction process. Professor Ting-Toomey's theoretical framework of facework maintenance strategies can by used by mediators to recognize face issues that may be involved in the particular mediation so that they can conduct themselves

---

[23] See, Attachment 1, taken from Ng., J. S. K. 1999. The four faces of face: implications for mediation. A paper presented at the 2nd Mediation Conference at the National University of Singapore. www.emcc.org.sg/articles.html.

[24] Oetzel, J.D., S. Ting-Toomey, T. Masumoto, Y. Yokochi, X. Pan, J. Takai and R. Wilcox. 2001. Face and facework in conflict: a cross-cultural comparison of China, Germany, Japan and the United States, supra, p. 603.

[25] Eastern / Collectivist orientation would tend to use face-giving, self-effacing and other-face facework strategies (e.g., avoid potential face threat, apologize and take blame, avoid embarrassing or humiliating others, other-oriented conversation, high-context communication style).

[26] Western / Individualism orientation would tend to use saving-face, face-restoration and self-face strategies (e.g., repair damage and reassert self, justify actions and blame situation, no concern for other party, outcome-oriented conversation, low-context communication style).

and the mediation process in a way that is supportive of both parties face and thereby minimizes the occurrence or influence of facework behavior in the mediation.

Facework Strategies in Mediation

Face-Restoration is evident when a party is reluctant to participate in the mediation process or to disclose information. When face-restoration behavior occurs, that is an indication that the party (a) may perceive a need to protect their privacy, (b) may be concerned that disclosing information may infringe on their control over their affairs, or (c) may be concerned about how the information might affect the party's image to the other party. In this situation, it is unlikely that participation or information will be forthcoming unless and until the reluctant party is persuaded to see an advantage in the negotiation and is assured of his or her control over the process.

Face-restoration as a behavior strategy can be understood in reference to Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs Model[27] as a signal that the recalcitrant party has a basic ego need[28] that will dominate that party's behavior until it is satisfied. The challenge for the mediator is to gain the party's confidence and obtain enough information to identify the party's self-esteem need or concern. To do this, the mediator needs to effectively communicate his or her impartiality, respect for the parties' autonomy, and commitment to keep private information confidential. The mediator also needs to effectively communicate, reinforce and assure the parties of their control over the mediation process and outcome.

---

[27] Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory of psychology that Abraham Maslow proposed in his 1943 paper *A Theory of Human Motivation*. His theory contends that as humans meet their basic needs, they seek to satisfy successively higher needs that occupy a set hierarch. See, Attachment 2. Maslow, A. H. 1943. A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychological Review 50*, pages 370-396; Maslow, A. H. 1970. *Motivation and personality, 2nd edition*. New York: Harper & Row.

[28] There are two aspects of ego or esteem needs: the need for the respect of and recognition by others, and the need for self-respect.

Face-Saving is frequently described as a "self" behavior that a person does to regain his or her desired public image after it has been threatened, dismissed or lost.[29] However, using Professor Ting-Toomey's diagram, face-saving is actually an "other" behavior that evidences concern for another's image or the image of the parties' relationship. This facework strategy can be understood in reference to the "politeness theory" developed by Brown and Levinson,[30] which contends that when there is social distance between the parties, the listener has more perceived power than the speaker and there is an imposition involved in the communicative request or act, the speaker will demonstrate various levels of politeness in presenting the position or demand depending upon the degree of face threat to the other party and the level of desire on the speaker's part to mitigate that threat.[31]

In the context of a mediation, parties generally do not show concern for the image needs of others beyond extending common courtesies.[32] In this context, especially during the parties' opening statements, the mediator should anticipate that parties will be focused on trying to control the process and persuading the mediator of the validity or propriety of their respective views and demands using bald on-record communication strategies. The challenge for the

---

[29] Folger, J. P., M. S. Poole and R. K. Stutman. 2005. Face-saving, supra, pp. 146-148.

[30] Brown, P. and S.C. Levinson. 1978. Universals in language use: politeness phenomena. *Questions and politeness*, edited by E.N. Goody. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press; Brown, P. and S. Levinson. 1987. *Universals in language usage: politeness phenomena*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[31] See, Attachment 3. Folger, J. P., M. S. Poole and R. K. Stutman. 2005. Face-saving, supra, pp. 146-147. At the highest level of politeness, the speaker's strategy is to avoid the face threat completely by not making the request or statement. At the next level of politeness, the speaker goes off-record by making the request or statement in an ambiguous or indirect manner. At the next level of politeness, the speaker uses negative politeness by expressly recognizing the other party's autonomy in conjunction with the face threatening request or statement. At the next level of politeness, the speaker uses positive politeness by coupling the face threatening request or statement with a compliment. At the lowest level of politeness, the speaker's strategy is a bald on-record in which the face threatening statement or request is made without any attempt to acknowledge or address the other party's face needs. Id.

[32] Griffin, E. 1997. *A first look at communication theory*. New York: McGraw Hill.

mediator will be to introduce the concept of concern about the other party's image needs and to facilitate dialogue versus demands. One tool that is uniquely available to the mediator to accomplish this purpose is reframing the parties' issues in such a way that the other party can receive the message (and openly acknowledge receipt) without compromising or losing his or her face in the negotiation.[33]

Face-assertion is evident when a party becomes defensive and may include such behaviors as refusing to step back from a position, avoiding important conflict issues or taking issue with what he or she perceives to be unjust intimidation. At its core, this behavior represents an attempt by one party to protect against threat to face or to reestablish face after face loss. Using Professor Ting-Toomey's diagram, face-assertion is the "self" behavior that a person engages in to protect or repair relational images in response to threats, real or imagined, potential or actual. This type of behavior, if left unchecked, can lead to inflexibility and stalemate in the negotiation. Like face-restoration, face-assertion behavior is evidence of an ego need that must be addressed and resolved to the satisfaction of the threatened party before communication or interaction about the problem can proceed.

Face-assertion as a behavior strategy can be understood in reference to reciprocity theory[34] because having face means both "commanding social influence over others as well as

---

[33] In this regard, one authority has asserted that even in the midst of conflict, people tend to pay as much or more attention to maintaining the face of the other party as they do to preserving their own. Griffin, E. 1997. *A first look at communication theory*, supra.

[34] Reciprocity theory maintains that escalation and deescalation patterns in conflict interaction are often a result of reciprocity and compensation. According to several theorists, reciprocity is a social norm that undergirds all social exchange processes. Folger, J. P., M. S. Poole and R. K. Stutman. 2005. Face-saving, supra, p. 255, citing Roloff, M. E. and D. E. Campion. 1985. Conversational profit-seeking: interaction as social exchange. *Sequence and pattern in communicative behavior*, edited by R. L. Street, Jr., and J. N. Cappella. London: Edward Arnold. In this regard, it has been suggested that the norm of reciprocity prescribes two things: "people should help those who have helped them, and people should not injure those who have helped them;" that a recipient of a benefit is morally obligated to return a benefit in kind. Id., citing Gouldner, A. W. 1960. The norm of reciprocity: a preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review 25* and Roloff, M. E. 1987. Communication and reciprocity within

being influenced by others.[35] The challenge for the mediator is to demonstrate to the parties that mutual acceptance of face is "a condition of interaction not its objective."[36] The mediator sets the stage for reciprocity by attending "to both sides' cognitions, emotions, and internal assumptions about the conflict" and being nonjudgmental[37] so as to create a supportive environment big enough to tolerate the parties different face needs or wants and thereby inhibit or mitigate the parties' defensive responses.

Face-giving is evident when strategic moves are made by one party in support of another party's image or identity claims.[38] One authority has offered that face-giving may at times be crucial to "preserving a positive climate for conflict resolution" and is a strategy mediators need to employ to "help move the parties through sensitive conflicts to sustainable resolution – with egos and relationships intact."[39] In the context of mediation, the mediator acts as face-giver.[40]

Face-giving as a behavior strategy can be understood in reference to the Johari Window, named after the first names of its inventors, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham,[41] as a process of human interaction involving disclosure and feedback. Disclosure occurs when one person trusts another person enough to reveal aspects of himself that he or she does not know. In terms of the

---

intimate relationships. *Interpersonal processes: new directions in communication research*, edited by R. E. Roloff and G. R. Miller. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

[35] Ho, D. Y. 1994. Face dynamics: from conceptualization to measurement. *The Challenge of facework*, edited by Stella Ting-Toomey. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, p. 272.

[36] Goffman, E. 1967. *Interaction ritual: essays on face-to-face negotiation*. New York: Doubleday, p. 12.

[37] Van Ginkel, E. 2004. The mediator as face-giver, supra, p. 482.

[38] Folger, J. P., M. S. Poole and R. K. Stutman. 2005. Face-saving, supra, pp. 167.

[39] Van Ginkel, E. 2004. The mediator as face-giver, supra, p. 475-476.

[40] Id.

[41] See, Attachment 4, taken from Boshear, W. C. and K. C. Albrecht. 1977. *Understanding people: models and concepts.* La Jolla, CA: University Associates, pp. 82-89.

model, disclosure results in an increase in the Public Self area and a decrease in the Private Self area.[42] Feedback occurs when people perceive that a person is receptive, and results in the person sharing information about another person that that person does not know about himself or herself. In terms of the model, to the extent that feedback takes place, the person is able to reduce the Blind Self area and further increase the Public Self area.[43]

The challenge for the mediator is to develop sufficient rapport with the parties that he or she can obtain disclosures about the parties' interests underlying their positions and the values that support those interests because values are a critical element of a disputant's face needs.[44] "Parties' values are more than just interests, or what is important and why … [V]alues are actually windows on complex worldviews related to how individuals and groups make meaning."[45]

Conclusion

The problem solving aspects of mediation would be a simpler process if the mediator could instruct everyone to leave their face at the door. That is not possible because face is a part of human behavior. As such, the image needs or wants of the parties must be considered, accommodated and incorporated into the conflict communication and problem solving process. This means that parties to a mediation will need "face" time during the course of the mediation. In any mediation, the mediator should anticipate that there will be face wants or needs and thus facework strategies at play. To be effective, the mediator needs to come to the mediation prepared to give face and respond to facework behavior. Such a strategy on the part of the

---

[42] Id.

[43] Id.

[44] Van Ginkel, E. 2004. The mediator as face-giver, supra, p. 484.

[45] Id., citing LeBaron, M. 1998. Mediation and multicultural reality. *American Sociological Review 41*, p. 838.

mediator is necessary so as to avoid negotiating over face, to help the parties move beyond their respective face concerns, to promote a climate of change, and to keep the parties focused on the problem and on working towards a solution that is mutually acceptable on all levels.

Attachment 1

Attachment 2

Attachment 3

Attachment 4